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UNCLAS COLOMBO 002063

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS
NSC FOR DORMANDY
DEPARTMENT PASS USAID/OFDA - THAYER
BANGKOK FOR TOM DOLAN
NEW DELHI FOR FAS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: CASC AEMR EAID PREL PGOV MV
SUBJECT: TFX001: MALDIVES SITREP -- LOW CASUALTIES, HIGH PROPERTY DAMAGE

REF: COLOMBO 2053 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. FOREIGN TOURISTS: Econoff visited Maldives on December 27, 2004. As of 2030 on December 27, no American citizens have been reported killed in Maldives and there are no known American citizens reported missing or injured in Maldives. The Government of the Republic of Maldives (GORM) believes it has done a complete accounting of foreigners at tourist resorts. Three British tourists died; any other injuries to foreign tourists were only minor, according to GORM officials. Safari boat operators were also contacted and reported no losses. In general, tourist islands fared better than locally inhabited islands.

¶2. AFFECTED MALDIVIANS: The Maldivian casualty figures stand at 52 dead, plus 68 missing (presumed dead). The GORM estimates that 17,000 Maldivians -- from the 122 islands reported -- have been internally displaced by the December 26 tsunami. Seventy-nine inhabited islands had not reported

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back to Male'. Nineteen out of the 122 contacted islands are "total losses," according to officials. Those citizens are being evacuated to other nearby islands or to the capital island of Male'. One whole island of 4,000 citizens was evacuated to Male'. In addition to food and water, shelter is the next most critical need.

¶3. GORM officials told econoff during a December 27 visit to Male' that communications to approximately one-quarter of the 200 inhabited (not resort) islands had been disrupted. According to officials, the swell destroyed the generators that operated the microwave communication towers. Speed boat between islands has become the next most useful form of communication.

¶4. UN MISSION: According to a late December 28 conversation with UNDP Resident Representative Moez Doraid, the four most critical needs in Maldives are water, food, medical supplies, and transportation (of supplies to the outlying islands). Doraid said that water supplies/acquifers had been destroyed on 37 inhabited islands and there was limited or no electricity on 31 islands. UNDP is basing planning estimates on a target population of 100,000 (the most severely affected). UNDP is anticipating the arrival of two additional UN officials from India as well as the late December 28 arrival of a 4-person UNOCHA team for a 15-day mission. Doraid told poloff that UN Maldives would have the capacity to support the delivery of U.S. assistance.

¶5. USAID PLANS: USAID officials are tentatively planning to send one member of the DART team to Maldives on or about December 31 for an initial assessment of providing a commodities shipment.

¶6. OTHER ASSISTANCE TO MALDIVES: GORM officials told econoff that two Pakistani ships already in the Maldives on a "friendship visit," were helping to evacuate Maldivians to Male'. The Indians have sent two coast guard planes and are sending two coast guard ships, two small and one large helicopters, all estimated to be arriving in the next two days. Shallow draught boats to ship supplies are needed to approach and clear the reefs surrounding each island.

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